

CASTING ON, CASTING OFF

ENTANGLEMENTS
in LEARNING



Aalto University

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Nordic Visual Studies and
Art Education.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis centers on exploring the reflections and experiences in informal learning situations while looking into Harju Youth Center as a case. There are four main explorations informing this thesis: 1. Looking into Harju's social function and strategies, 2. The pilot project "Thursdays in Harju", an art exhibition and open mic night facilitated by MA NoVA students in the center, 3. Interactions and input from users of the space and 4. An arts and experience inquiry through knitting with Hanna Päivinen, a frequent user of the space.

While exploring the four aspects of this research, critical ethnography was the main methodology used, it opened-up reflections in positionality and the emancipatory qualities of informal learning in a multi-voiced format through visuals, written reflections, diaries and interviews.

This thesis highlights Harju as the "Third", a space for open learning, where connections and relationships are formed and an atmosphere that opens-up possibilities. A space for departure, arrival and an in-between.

Keywords: Informal learning, art and experience, Harju Youth Center, critical ethnography, multi-voiced method

PROLOGUE

(A teacher's recollection as/of a learner)

Recalling the entirety of my Secondary and Tertiary education, I've always had the preference for teachers who discussed their lessons in relation to lived experiences. Somehow, I found it easier to digest concepts and lessons through them. But these rare occurrences did not change a viewpoint that has been ingrained in me; that teachers are authorities and masters in their field and students are receivers un/knowingly following the concept of duality or linearity.

I ended up teaching (arts and craft) myself, and although I have taught technical skills for the most parts, there were opportunities to look at an artwork's historical, material, intrinsic and aesthetic value as a point of departure for open discussion and personal interpretation.

During a period of teaching kids aged 2.5-7 years, there were instances where I felt the need to modify my teaching style with that of the student's skill or interest of the project and subject at hand.

I recall a 4-year old boy who came for a trial class. He did not speak a word at the start and looked at me wide-eyed and with such intensity. His parents expressed their worry that he might have a condition leading to him not wanting to communicate or being firm with his decisions. According to them, he loved to doodle and paint but was never good at following the teacher's instructions.

I asked what he wanted to draw, he chose a helicopter from the images presented (as he wasn't verbally communicating at that point). With a step-by-step instruction, he was able complete his drawing. He was beginning to loosen up when asked what color he wants to paint the sky with, he chose purple. I thought this was great to prepare for the next steps; I asked him to

choose other colors he would like to use for the different parts of the drawing. He was stuck with purple (I later found out it was his favorite color). I showed him the different shades in a palette and asked him if he would be interested in trying out different shades of purple or if he would like to stick with one. He nodded his head and we went on painting every part with a different shade. He was happy, and so was I.

I ended up teaching him for the next 2-3 years. Those teaching moments were full of negotiations (after which, I left for further studies). When he was about 5 years old, he wanted to draw a very complicated picture with several characters. The school where I was teaching had guidelines on what to teach at what age and how to teach them, but he wasn't interested. He wanted to challenge himself and I conceded with the condition that he should try it out himself without the teacher showing how it is done and that he should stop and ask for help or switch to another project when it becomes too difficult. He managed to do it himself and even with occasional difficulty, he proved that he was able to execute the drawings. From then on, I continued to negotiate with his interests and the school's guidelines.

The school requires that teachers follow certain processes in teaching, which at times put me into trouble for defying. This was one of those encounters where I thought, the process needs to be constantly renegotiated. During that time, I had a gut feeling but could not articulate as to what it meant. I was either held back by a process, an institutional mandate, a parent's specific request and a constant fear that teachers are the authority and transmitter of knowledge and somehow, to concede with what the students want to do is frowned upon. Where is the learner factor in any of this?

Having been exposed to Critical Pedagogy and a democratic form of learning in the classroom and in institutions while taking my master's degree in AALTO University, such experience has shaken me. My first year was full of emotional outbursts while finding out approaches in learning and realizing how naïve I was in this area. That emancipatory feeling of being able to relate my naïve experiences, find words to articulate my thoughts or even question them, led me into an exploration of learning and unlearning.

This thesis is one of the many traces of an ongoing exploration.

CHAPTER 1

Casting On (Introduction)

*"Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies.
And whoever emancipates, doesn't have to worry
about what the emancipated person learns. He will
learn what he wants, nothing maybe."*

(Rancière, 1991, p.18)

The Oxford Living Dictionary defines learning as the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. ("Learning," 2018) In this thesis, I take this definition as a basis and look beyond the production of a singular knowledge or skill. I aim to concentrate on the process of acquiring and deconstructing existing knowledge and the experiences and reflections that go with it.

This thesis explores the different experiences, encounters and realizations within and in relation to informal learning situations while looking into Harju (Harju Youth Center) as a case. Harju as an arts, craft and music youth center provided a window to experience an open learning approach brought about by the space and the institution's strategies. After being introduced to the facilities and their programs, it took me into a path of discovery and became the central factor in this exploration of informal learning situations.

The diagram in the succeeding page illustrates the different aspects of interaction and data collection initiated or conducted within Harju that inform this thesis.

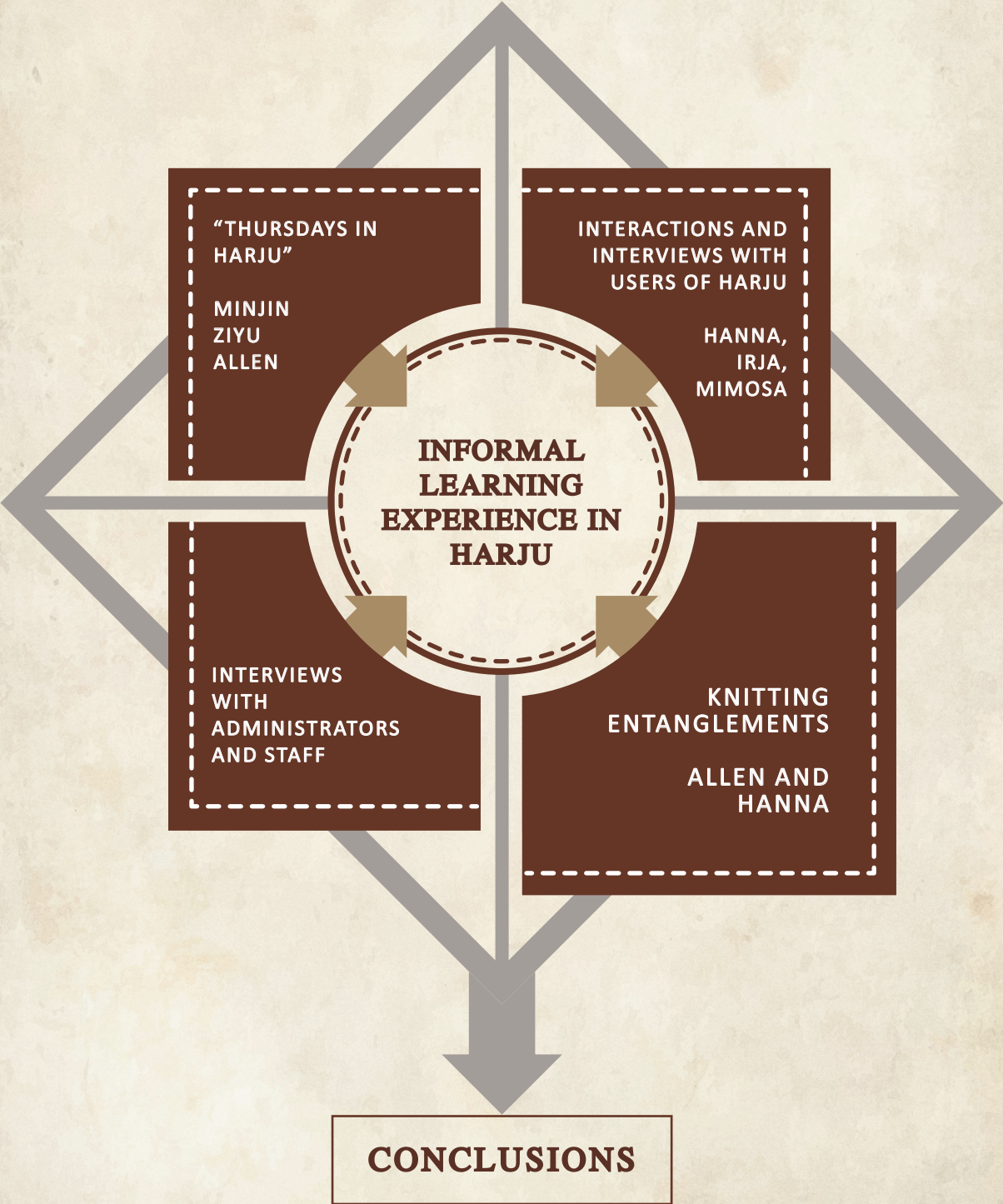


Figure 1 Relation of Data & Thesis Question

The three minor parts depicted in the diagram include the following:

- A. An excerpt of the three-way reflexive writing between Minjin, Ziyu and myself provides a varied account of the experiences and perceived roles while working on the project “Thursdays in Harju”, an exhibition and open mic night for the users of the space (Harju).
- B. Interviews with the administrators and staff of Harju gives us an insight into their driving principles, the importance of the space, their strategies and approaches to learning as well as their individual roles and social function.
- C. Interactions and an interview with Hanna, Irja and Mimosa explores the relationships formed, the user perspective on Harju and exploring possibilities of learning and connections beyond the space.

The larger component that informs this thesis is the knitting project with Hanna which provides a more intimate account of our informal learning reflections. What started out as a collaborative work that investigates the shifting of role as a learner and a teacher has turned into an exploration of the materials and other entanglements that caused a blurring of the roles within the given situation.

The different data sections encompassing the views and experiences in relation to Harju provide us with different perspectives that intersect and inform the study cohesively.

In conclusion, I would say that the space (Harju) plays a huge role in forging connections and creating opportunities for explorations in learning. Supported by the guiding principles and their social function, the administrators and staff continue to provide an accessible space for learning where users are free to express themselves.

Each chapter title in this thesis is a metaphor for the knitting materials and processes done with Hanna. **Casting On**, introduces the research and allows the reader to get a glimpse of how it is constructed. In knitting, to cast on is to create a row of stockinette stitches where you would cast on your succeeding rows of knits and purls. This marks the start of the process.

Navigating with Patterns looks into the methodologies and strategies in conducting the research. Patterns in knitting provide you with a format on how to proceed with your creation, whether it be a pair of socks or a scarf.

Entanglements look into the data collected. There are three minor sub-chapters that expounds on Harju as a space, the three-way writing as a recollection of the project “Thursdays in Harju” and the interview with the users of the space. A huge part of this chapter is the knitting experience with Hanna which will be divided in **Rows** of learning entanglements.

Casting Off (Or Not) attempts to provide a way to cohesively describe the process and provide window for further exploration in terms of this research. In Knitting, to cast off is to end or skillfully seal your stitches to avoid unravelling.

CHAPTER 2

Navigating with Patterns

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I draw upon the constructivist paradigm in answering the research question **“What experiences and reflections are brought about by informal learning situations?”** while looking into Harju Youth Center as a case.

The experiences and realizations brought forward by narratives, data through participant observation, diaries, interviews and dialogical writing provide a varied account, perception and interpretation of events from different positions therefore leaning on the ontological and epistemological beliefs of the constructivist paradigm wherein multiple socially constructed realities are in play while building an interactive link between the researcher and the participants where values and biases are made explicit. (Mertens, 2015)

At the same time, the driving force in conducting this research and the theories that seep into the reflections and analysis provide a critical view that questions the banking concept of learning.

In the words of Paulo Freire:

“The banking concept (with its tendency to dichotomize everything) distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or his laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher. Nor do the students practice any act of cognition, since the object towards which that act should be directed is the property of the teacher rather than a medium evoking the critical reflection of both teacher and students.” (1970, p.67)

In contrast to that of the banking concept of learning elaborated by Freire, the creative independence of the users of Harju presents an approach in learning that allows free movement and individual experimentation facilitated by instructors and youth workers.

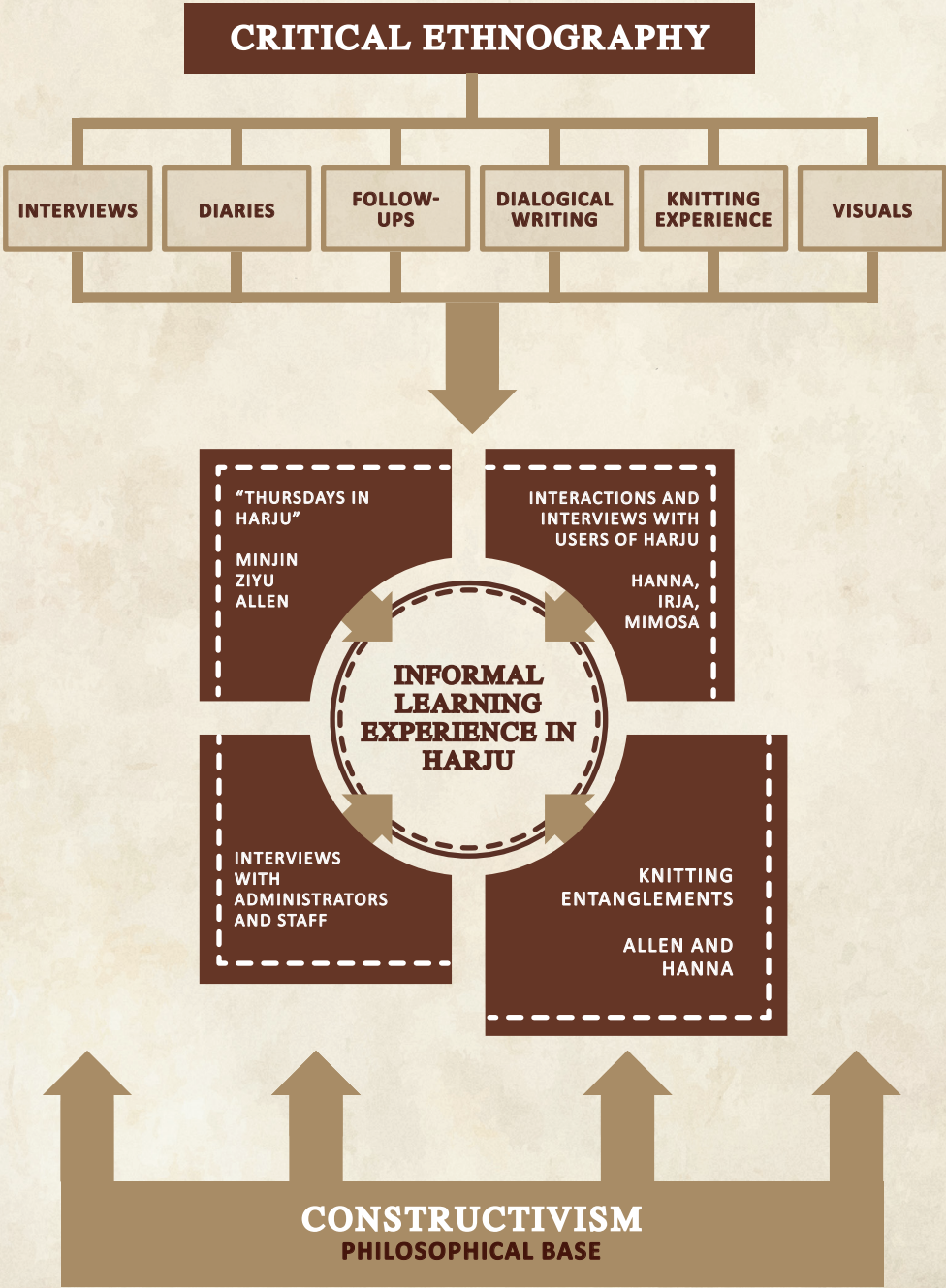


Figure 2 Thesis Setting (Methodological Framework)

THEORETICAL BASIS and CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Since this thesis partially touches upon the different layers and entanglements in an informal, formal and non-formal learning situation; I rely on the following classifications and descriptions as a point of reference when discussing the terms (Heikkinen, H.L.T., Jokinen H, Tynjälä, P., 2012, p.4):

1. **Formal learning** takes place in education institutions and is intentional in nature, it is highly institutionalized, often even bureaucratic, curriculum-driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates.
2. **Nonformal learning** is organized outside of the formal education system, for example in the workplace. Learning is also intentional but does not lead to a formal certification. This kind of education tends to be short-term, voluntary, and has very few if any prerequisites. However, it typically has a curriculum and often a facilitator.
3. **Informal learning** is usually unintentional and takes place as a side effect of other activities, such as work, in everyday settings.

In using the term **open learning** to describe Harju's approach, I draw upon their (Harju) teaching strategy and their use of space to promote creative independence with the possibility of young individuals learning from their peers. Open learning to them also describes the space as a venue for amalgamation, diversity and accessibility not only to their target group which is the "youth" but also to all ages accessing the space.

I would also like to expound certain terms and concepts pertaining to critical theories in education that are used as reflections in this thesis (I do not claim to be an expert on these theories and I acknowledge the fact that I continue to struggle with positionality in my practice).

In my struggles and reflections regarding positionality, I concentrate mainly on the concepts of emancipatory learning. The major theories that inform me in this aspect is that of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière. The open learning qualities of Harju evoke a lot of reflections regarding emancipatory learning through one's experience with the assemblage and variety of relationships formed in their creative space.

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* guides me in acknowledging my position or lack thereof in a learning situation. The idea of power and authority that affects every learner and teacher relationship and the attempt to break free from the concept of this duality produced by the banking concept of learning. To resolve this by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so they are both simultaneously teachers and students. (Freire, 1970)

He furthers that through dialogue, the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught, also teach. (1970, p.67)

In Rancière's thoughts on emancipation, I draw from his writings *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and *The Emancipated Spectator*. In the former, he recounts the story of the schoolmaster in the name of Jacotot and his discoveries and reflections on the myth of two intelligences, "the superior and the inferior" and of how one can go beyond the stultifying relationship of being the master and the ignoramus. Stultification as defined in his work is to "render stupid" or to numb and deaden. (Rancière, 1991)

In the latter, he talks about emancipation in relation to theatre. I discern through his writings that although a spectator seems like a passive actor in the setting, he is very much active in a way that he processes what he sees and reacts to and translates what is happening on stage. In the same way the actors on stage are affected by the spectators' reactions or reception. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator much like a pupil or a scholar observes, selects, compares and interprets linking what she sees to a host of things on stage and in all kinds of places. (Rancière, 2011)

I use my translations and discernment of the concepts as part of a reflexive analysis of the diaries and dialogues for the large part, in the chapter, **Knitting Entanglements**. His concept on mutual teaching where he explicates that each ignorant person could become, for another ignorant person the master who would reveal to him his intellectual power and Emancipation where every common person might conceive his human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity and decide how to use it becomes a recurring voice in my head while conducting this research. (Rancière, 1991)

Rancière's idea of the entangled relations of a spectator with its thoughts (among others) and the process of translating resonates with the Deleuzian concept of a "rhizome", a concept that can be applied to varied situations; one which assumes a very diverse form and extends in all direction or can be approached from different standpoints. I use this concept in exploring the intersections and entanglements of materials, individuals, space and reflections which constitute the rhizomatic character of this research. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004)

Critical Ethnography as a framework

Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge or ways of knowing that is based on an ethnographer's own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during that process. Therefore [visual] ethnography, as I interpret it, does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink, 2013, p. 35)

Drawing from Pink's definition of ethnography, I provide the reader with an account of the events from various standpoints including auto-ethnographic narratives, sensorial and visual interpretations of learning events and materials in this thesis.

I use Critical Ethnography as an umbrella in this study to highlight the concept that ethnographic processes departing from the classic observation approach and insist on reflexive and experiential process through which academic and applied understanding, knowing and knowledge are produced are critical in nature. (Pink, 2015)

In support and in relation to the data, I rely on the method of crystallization as presented by Richardson and St. Pierre where the validity of the data is approached through multidimensionality and an infinite variety of approaches. What we see depends on the angle of our repose. (Richardson, 2005)

Crystallization embraces the idea that truth is made up of multiple perspectives, which are connected to specific contexts and points in time. It elaborates that research is not neutral but is shaped by the individual's backgrounds, ideologies and life experiences. It combines multiple form of analysis and representation into a text or a series of text building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researcher's vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (Brown, Carducci, Kuby, 2014, p.131)

Analysis in Ethnographic Research and in this thesis

I draw on Pink's thoughts on analysis in sensory ethnography which first situates analysis in the fieldwork process and second, that analysis can be thought of, not as a structured or structural phase in the research process, but rather as a way of knowing engaged in by the researcher during the research. The idea that fieldwork and analysis for different stages of ethnographic process can create the misconception that after the fieldwork, the remaining task of the ethnographer is simply to analyze the content of the research materials. (Pink, 2015, p.143)

In the same way as Pink situates analysis in ethnography, the written reflections throughout the presentation of data and experiences in this thesis form a level of analysis. A general account of the entire research may attempt to provide an analysis of the processes towards the end, but the minor analysis of the collected data holds its own.

Ethnography and Ethics

Ethics in Ethnography highlights positionality, it forces us researchers to acknowledge our own power, privilege and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects. A concern for positionality is sometimes called "reflexive ethnography". As researchers, we are accountable for our own research paradigms, our own positions of authority and our moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation.

One way of presenting different positionalities is through Dialogue. A meeting on multiple sides in an encounter and among others, one where there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others' worlds.

Dialogue or dialogical performance resists conclusions. It keeps the conversation on going and open. It is a reciprocal giving and receiving rather than a timeless resolve. It is both difference and unity, agreement and disagreement, a separation and a coming together. (Madison, 2012, p.11)

One of the main ethical concerns while working on this thesis is the constant negotiation while the research evolved.

"Consent in fieldwork studies is a process, not a one-off event and may require negotiation over time." (Davies, 2008, p.56)

As the researcher in this context, I had to articulate my background and my motivation, which I have stated in the Prologue, when looking into the learning phenomenon in Harju. I acknowledge that I have exercised my authority as the researcher in presenting an initial structure on how the research will be conducted. I presented a collaborative learning experience among the users of the space, with or without my direct participation as the researcher. Thoughts on collaborative fiction writing, comics and illustrations among other artistic and creative learning approaches were discussed.

There were three proposals but only one pushed through. The idea has evolved from ceramics to a knitting experience from constant interaction and discussion of interests with my co-researcher Hanna. Naturally, as someone who does not have a background in knitting, I had to assume the role of a learner. Taking out the knitting experience from the confines of Harju was a conscious and consensual decision allowing a more flexible and conducive set-up for a beginner.

Considering my position and the nature of critical ethnography in research, I emphasize the use of a first person approach in writing this thesis. This written result is a product of a construct that hinges on my experiences and thoughts while relying on the multiple voices that intersect with my own.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND STRATEGIES

The methods and strategies used in this study include participant observation and writing as a method to present reflections and experiences. Certain events and moments warranted sensorial and visual approaches in writing. In this thesis, it is evident in interviews, food and knitting experiences. Eventually these methods and data, along with theories are bounced off with each other through crystallization.

DATA COLLECTED FOR THIS THESIS			
TYPE OF DATA	DESCRIPTION	EXTENT	TIME PERIOD COLLECTED (PRODUCED)/DURATION
SELF-PRODUCED	Knitted socks and swatches (produced during an exploration in learning with Hanna Päivinen)	a pair of socks and a knitting swatch	The swatch was started in September 2017 while production of the actual socks started in November 2017 and completed in April 2018. Meet-ups were scheduled only on Sundays due to schedule conflicts. There were some random breaks during the period of production.
	Diary entries and field notes (produced for documentation of processes, interactions and reflections)	Four documents with 12 pages (combined) of random notes and lengthy digital entries.	Produced between the period of April 2017 - April of 2018
	Timelines, Visuals, Diagrams, Sketches and post-it notes (produced as guidelines for learning, research, theoretical reflections and visual representations)	3 pages of personal sketches for knitting procedures and retention, a collection of sticky notes with theoretical reflections and 16 pages of diagram sketches and timelines to keep me on track and for the layout.	The production period of these materials were between December 2017 and April 2018. Sketches of the knitting procedures were done in December and some visuals, timelines and diagrams were produced while working on this thesis. As for the theoretical reflections, random notes were produced since April of 2017.
INTERVIEWS with Administrators and Users of the Space (As data and in support of data)	Pekka Juntunen (Executive Producer of Harju)	28.41 minutes recorded interview with 2 pages of transcription	Interviews were conducted between March 7 - 14, 2018 and transcriptions were completed on March 26, 2017
	Rozza Dragoz (Media and Music Producer of Harju)	11.34 minutes recorded interview with 3 pages of transcription	
	Anu Horttanainen (Youth Worker/ Art Instructor at Harju)	12.16 minutes of recorded interview with 2 pages of transcription	
	Nordin Ben Hmidou (Cultural Youth Leader/Social Worker)	25.25 minutes recorded interview with 3 pages of transcription	
	Sari Parviainen (Youth Worker/Ceramic and Art Teacher)	21.49 minutes of recorded interview with 2 pages of transcription	
	Irja, Mimosa and Hanna (Users of the space)	50.52 minutes recorded interview with 4 pages of transcription	
ILLUSTRATIONS, IMAGES, VIDEO CLIPS AND PRESENTATIONS (Functions as visual representations in this thesis and documentation of the events that transpired)	Certain illustrations and visual representations were taken from the documentation and guest-books of the project "Thursdays in Harju" The images can be attributed to Yu Ziyu, Minjin Chung, Solip Park, Mimosa Salmela, Hanna Päivinen and myself. Some of the images were processed as part of the graphical representations in this book with permission from the contributors.	Over 400 still images and 60 video clips of visuals that were produced and archived from the project "Thursdays in Harju" and Knitting Entanglements with Hanna.	The images and clips were collected and archived from September 2016 - April 2018.
DIGITAL COMMUNICATION	Email Communication and Exchanges	Email communications and exchanges were sent to Harju administrator Pekka Juntunen NoVA students Minjin Chung and Yu Ziyu to negotiate schedules and request for interviews & collaboration	December 2017 - March 2018
	Social Media interactions through applications such as Facebook messenger worked as a documentation of the communication within and outside of the project setting (relevant in informing the project)	Interactions were mostly with Hanna Päivinen, Yu Ziyu, Minjin Chung and Rozza Dragoz	September 2016 - April 2018
THURSDAYS IN HARJU DATA	"Thursdays in Harju" Written Reflections from Minjin Chung, Yu Ziyu and myself	8 total pages of written reflections	Negotiated and produced between December - March 2018
	IMAGES from the Exhibition Archives for visual representation in the thesis	6 - 10 images used from the archives	Produced between the period of October - November 2016
	Interview notes for visual text representations in the thesis	1 entry from Melina Molin, used with permission	Interview conducted on the 17th of November, 2016.
DATA PRODUCED BY HANNA	Diary logs and descriptions used for the reflections and data input	2 page document containing both short and lengthy diary logs	produced between the period of April 2017 - March 2018
	Video clips and images from the encounter to document progress and processes.	approximately 100 archived images and 15 video clips	Produced between the period of April 2017 - April 2018
	Descriptive information on processes and tools as well as the knitting patterns	description of materials, preparation of Karelian pie and corrections in Finnish terms, names and spelling	March - April 2018

Figure 3 Data collection timeline and input

Participants and their contribution

The participants in this thesis have contributed in various ways and on different levels. The Harju administrators and staff have been working in Harju for a period of 5- 26 years. The team composed of their Executive Producer Pekka Juntunen, their Music and Events Coordinator Rozza Dragoz, their Cultural Youth Workers and Art Instructors including Anu Horttanainen, Nordin Ben Hmdou and Sari Parviainen provided me with a clear baseline on the how the center functions, their programs, history and the individual roles each one take. They have also provided me with accessibility to the space and encouraged interactions with its users.

Masters in Nordic Visual Studies and Art Education students Minjin Chung and Yu Ziyu contributed greatly through a three-way reflexive writing of our experience with the project “Thursdays in Harju”. Each of us wrote independently and I facilitated the reading exchange as well as a collective discussion of our thoughts on the process and the content of our reflections. The excerpts included in this thesis were discussed and presented to them prior to submission.

Some would argue that since Harju was created with the youth in mind, I would have to work with informants that fit the age group. But it is very evident that the space is frequented by individuals who may not fit the age requirement put in place by most youth centers (13-23 yrs). The participants that I was able to interact with are outside of this target group but have been frequenting the space (on Thursdays) for a period of 5 to 10 years.

In spite of the very critical importance of informants, the process of selecting them is not a oneway procedure. Researchers (Ethnographers), are often as much selected by their informants as the reverse. (Davies, 2008) Irja, Mimosa and Hanna have contributed so much in terms of experience, thoughts, reflections, visual representations and other practicalities that inform of their connection with each other and to Harju as a creative space.

Majority of the interaction was with Hanna who acted as my co-researcher in an arts-based learning exploration. While other proposed collaborations did not seem to work out due to varied reasons (relocation to another country or lack of inspiration), Hanna provided a similar enthusiasm with me in a new experience.

Our interactions, her expertise in ceramics and knitting as well as my interest in learning the craft led to knitting sessions and other entanglements. Our thoughts and interactions are presented through diary excerpts, reflections and images of the processes.

Our sessions had to coincide with our schedule outside of Harju and it became our Sunday meetups. In a period of 7 months (and counting), we have had approximately 15 Sunday meetings of at least 3 hours. We also occasionally meet outside of these sessions with Irja and Mimosa or just to explore the Asian stores in Hakaniemi and in Kamppi.

TIMELINE		GUIDE QUESTIONS WHILE WORKING
SEPT 2016 NOV 2016	Fieldwork and execution of the project “Thursdays in Harju”	How did the pilot project “Thursdays in Harju” open up the possibility for further collaborations and investigations within the space and with its users?
	Intermittent visits and interactions in Harju during school break and while on exchange in Konstfack, Sweden	What collaborative work best serve the users of Harju while allowing them and the researchers to explore the knowledge produced by experience? How were the roles negotiated in the beginning?
DEC 2016 APR 2017	MARCH 2017 Conception of the project idea	What are the strengths and advantages of Harju that can be explored and turned into a study?
	APRIL 2017 Discussion with Hanna, Mimosa and Irja on the proposed project	How can a researcher do away with the grandness of a proposal and work with what is available and what the situation presents?
	May 2017 – August 2017 – Negotiating schedule and project possibilities	
SEPT 2017	First two meetings with Hanna outside of Harju (Introduction to the knitting project, materials and experience)	How does one convey experiences within an arts-based informal learning situation? What are the entanglements that happen within the learning situation and during moments of reflection?
OCT 2017 DEC 2017	Consistent Sunday meet-ups for the knitting project	
	Culinary Entanglements and occasional meet-ups outside of the project set-up	
JAN 2018 MAR 2018	Going through existing diaries and writing production of the data collected	
	Intermittent meet-ups with Hanna on Sundays	
	Continuity of the Knitting project outside of the Sunday meet-ups	
	Interview with Harju Administration (7.3)	What are the strengths and advantages of Harjun Nuorisotalo? How do they function?
	Interview with Hanna, Irja, Mimosa (14.3)	What insights can be gathered from users about the space and the relationships forged within the space?
	Collaborative Analysis of personal reflections on “Thursdays in Harju” with Minjin and Ziyu (24.3)	What new thoughts and perspectives are made clear when using writing as a method of inquiry?

Figure 4 Timeline and Working Questions

CHAPTER 3

Entanglements

I. HARJU YOUTH CENTER: HISTORY and SOCIAL FUNCTION THROUGH ARTS, CRAFT AND MUSIC

In Harju's webpage, I started to learn about the history, the facilities, their programs and organizations that they collaborate with. Although the texts are in Finnish, I used Google translate and cross-checked the details from Harju's Executive Producer Pekka Juntonen who has worked for the youth center since its opening in the mid 80's.

Harju Youth House which is located at Aleksis Kiven Katu was completed in 1922. The house was built as a place where the deceased were washed, placed in coffins and transported to Malmi Cemetery. It ceased operation in mid-1950s. After which, it served as a painting shop.

In 1978 all activities in the house ended when Harju's last caretaker retired and moved away with his family. The house that was inactive, however, did not remain empty as the homeless and vagrants soon found their way to take shelter in the house from winter and the cold. The house was left to the verge of collapse until the mid-1980s. At that time, there was this group of young people called "Vaasankatu gangs" at Helsingin Kallio, who stayed in a cellar at Vaasankatu. These young people were especially interested in music and playing, but they needed more space and discovered this vacant morgue. They contacted the Youth Director of the City of Helsinki who at that time was Pirjo-Riitta Karppinen and proposed the rehabilitation of the Harju Mortuary for young people. Karppinen was excited about the idea presented and the "Harju Music Hall" was born. The Helsinki Youth Council acquired the place in 1984, and in 1986 the center started to operate. (Historia, n.d., Retrieved from <http://harju.munstadi.fi/tietoa-meista/historia/>)

BUILDING COMPLETION

LOCATED AT ALEKSIS
KEVIN KATU

1922

1922
1950

MORTUARY

IT FUNCTIONED AS A
MORTUARY WHERE BODIES
WERE WASHED BEFORE THEY
WERE TRANSPORTED TO TO
MALMI CEMETERY



MID
1950's
1978

PAINTING SHOP

THE MORTUARY CEASED
OPERATION AND IT WAS TRANS-
FORMED INTO A PAINT SHOP

1978
1980

ALL OPERATIONS CEASED

THE HOUSE BECAME INACTIVE
AFTER THE LAST CARE TAKER
MOVED AWAY

THE HOMELESS BEGAN USING IT
AS A SHELTER FROM WINTER AND
THE COLD

BUILDING ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE

VAASANKATU GANGS WHO WERE INTER-
ESTED IN ARTS AND MUSIC NEEDED MORE
SPACE AND FOUND THE EMPTY MORGUE

THE IDEA OF THE "HARJU MUSIC HALL"
WAS PRESENTED TO THEN YOUTH
DIRECTOR OF THE CITY OF HELSINKI,
PIRJO-RIITTA KARPPINEN

MID
1980's

1984

THE HELSINKI
YOUTH COUNCIL
ACQUIRED THE PLACE

HARJU YOUTH CENTER
OPERATIONS STARTED

1986

1986
PRESENT

HARJUN NUORISOTALO (ARTS AND MUSIC CENTER)

HARJU CONTINUES TO PROVIDE
THE YOUTH WITH AN AVENUE TO
EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH
ARTS AND MUSIC



Figure 5 History of Harju

It is hard to identify this lonely structure as a vibrant youth center, but they boast of facilities such as a dark room, art spaces focused on recyclable and sustainable art-making and ceramics, recording studios and performance spaces. They provide art and recording sessions that can be booked at a small price and an open day on Thursdays, where everyone is welcome to try out some arts and craft as well as DJ and other music classes available at that time. Although it is marked as a youth center, everyone is welcome to experience the activities, one of the qualities that differentiate them from other youth houses. On different occasions, you would bump into Sari, Anu and Heidi who handles the art program. They use a relaxing approach and allow individuals to experiment on materials (after a brief instruction on how to use the tools) and provide a certain openness where one can request for help when it is needed. Ultimately, it allows one to exercise creativity and experimentation. On other days, you get to work with Rozza and Isku who ensures that their recording artists and those who are interested in the area, feel comfortable and developed in their craft.

To get a better picture of how Harju functions and the importance of their space, I conducted a series of interviews with the administrators and staff. Here, I present their thoughts on Harju as a “site”, their “vision and strategy”, the “roles” they assume and the “learning” that happens.



Figure 6 Harju Youth Center focus areas

HARJU AS A SITE

Harju as a site invite individuals through its vibrant and open atmosphere as well as its facilities for arts and music. Anu compares it to a workroom (makers space) because it gives a lot of possibilities for the youth to explore their imagination. The space is full of professional materials [as much as possible] so that they [the youth] can feel and try to make something on a higher level without getting frustrated. “We try to give them the proper tools”, she adds. (A. Horttanainen, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

It is important that they (the youth) can find a common space or common things to do together. To connect music with art and to connect musicians with each other. The space mainly promotes openness and diversity.

I’m proud that Harju invites more diversity. We produce music in English and language is not an obstacle.

In terms of our music program, I am very happy with our Street Soul Studio. The one thing that differentiates us from other music studio (of course each studio has their own personality) is that we make music in English. Most of the users here don’t speak Finnish yet and you make music in the language you are more comfortable with.

All languages are welcome and not knowing any of the languages should not be an obstacle especially with arts and music. There are no limits, you can express yourself regardless of the distance, the language and the ability. (R. Dragoz, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

"Our involvement with youth immigrants and immigrant associations is a huge factor in diversity. We make the space accessible for them, help them or advise them on how they can get some funds for functions or to connect their own activities to bigger activities.

Harju is a very interesting space, and in my opinion, there should be more of this space. In general, the youth centers and youth houses are always situated in an area which is planned to be the local spots for youngsters who have some free time for activities. There are existing groups who go there and if there is some (new) group or individuals who try to come in, they have to make a lot of effort to get in the existing group or even get the help they need. It becomes too much for the workers and the youth coming in.

Harju as an open space can give you a very interesting life experience that you might not remember at the moment but maybe later in life."
(N. Ben Hmidou, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

ON VISION AND STRATEGY

As part of the youth service sector of the government of Helsinki, Harju performs a social function and is therefore governed by its founding principles.

Pekka Juntunen, the Executive Producer of Harju articulates that the principles of Harju are still the same from what it was in the beginning. "We are open for anyone, with no discrimination, we force nothing. It is still dependent on how people want to function in here and we remain open to everyone. The biggest difference then and now is probably immigration. In the 80's we only had Finnish users but now, we have worked with immigrant groups but the principles' still stand.

At the start, there were age limits in the youth centers but we (Harju) never had an age limit as to who can come here. It's open for everyone. The idea is to make it more like a Citizen House; that different age groups make things together and older and younger people are cooperating." (P. Juntunen, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

Nowadays, the structure of youth services in Helsinki are going in the direction of Harju. It has been our profile to have different age groups using the same space. Other youth houses only have youngsters and even with that, there is a kind of segregation within the age group.

Youth work should be all about giving the best for the future of the society. Because the youngsters are representing the future, in my opinion, they should be given free time, spaces to breath and places to provide them with tools to be active and influence things in the society. That is one aspect for me that is very important with the work. (N. Ben Hmidou, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

ON ROLES

Each of the staff performs a role guided by the principles of Harju. There is this clear notion that youth work is the priority and arts and music follow. In the following accounts of the youth workers in Harju, they provide a cohesive understanding of their roles and the flexibility when working with different individuals.

"It is not easy to find the balance between social work and teaching a skill. It is a sensitive work to learn about people and to know them and their skills, so you have to be aware all the time. Maybe it's the most difficult thing, to find out what is needed at the moment of interaction. Is it art teaching or giving an advice to something totally different. Something that belongs to everyday life.

Sensing and feeling comes with practice. You become wiser and braver in opening up with your students. When you're open, then others can be open too. It is easier for people to communicate with you when you act both as a teacher and a human being. " (S. Parviainen, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

“Teaching is a big thing. I am a youth worker, so the youngsters are the main thing and I’m using arts and handicrafts like a tool for them. In other places, they are teaching art, but we have a different angle in this teaching. Arts and Handicrafts are really good tools in improving and boosting their personalities and a lot more. It depends on an individual’s situation. Sometimes it can just be about techniques and skills that they can use to improve themselves with. There are so many levels to it. And it can happen all at the same time.” (A. Horta-nainen, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

ON LEARNING

Harju is about learning a skill and providing an avenue for creativity. But it is also more than that. It takes its function as a youth house and approach learning in a different way. In the interviews conducted with the administrators and staff of Harju, they have emphasized that arts and music are tools for social work, but at the same time, learning a skill can get them somewhere, gain connections and become professionals in the field. (S. Parviainen, P. Juntunen, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

Nordin discusses the focus on participatory approach where the youth takes time to learn by doing and participating in the activities instead of just hanging around. This is how they continue to make the center work and sustainable. (N. Ben Hmidou, personal communication, March 7, 2018)

CHAPTER REFLECTIONS

The interviews conducted brought to light the parallel relationship of the accessibility of the space and the main principles that guide the functions of the space. Harju’s structure is not a convention in Helsinki, but the city is slowly heading into the direction of an open learning space but the focus on the youth still remains. Their goal puts their user’s interest first and allows this concept to inform them and on what role is needed at a specific moment.

II. THURSDAYS IN HARJU: A GATEWAY TO LEARNING EXPLORATIONS

In our first NoVA Seminar class, we were tasked to work with an organization or institution and come up with a project collaborating with them or in relation to their vision mission, activities or even just the use of space. We were given a background of each institution and the opportunity to choose. I ended up with Harju, an arts and music youth center, along with Yu Ziyu and Minjin Chung. The next figure illustrates the timeline of our immersion and participation, up to the event. It is then followed by a three-way reflection that tackles the role of the space in creating possibilities.

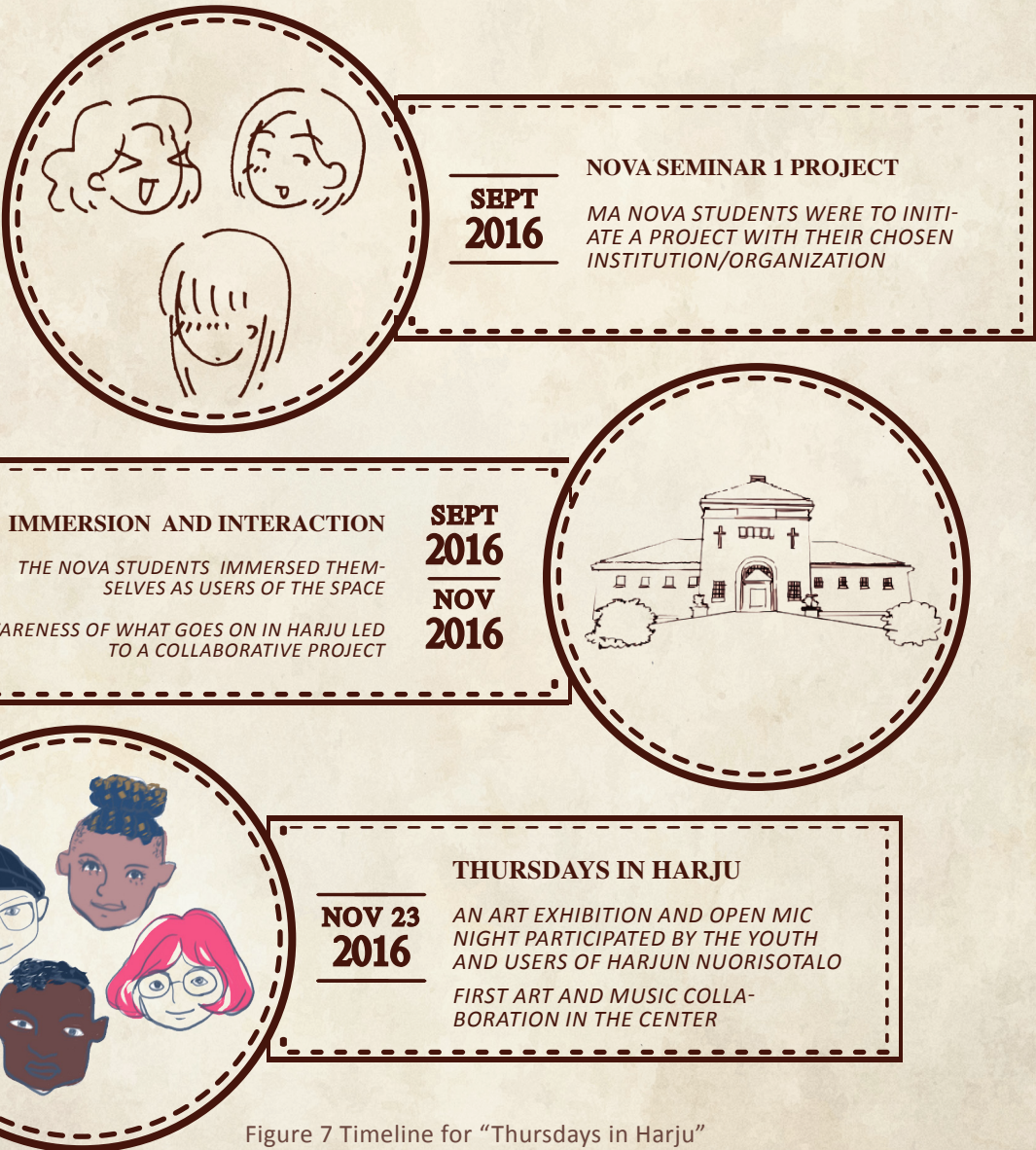


Figure 7 Timeline for “Thursdays in Harju”



ALLEN

"The first recollection I have when thinking about the project 'Thursdays in Harju' is fear and uncertainty. During the NoVA Seminar Class, we were introduced to the different institutions that we could work with, I was torn between Harju, an arts, crafts and music youth center, and PORVOO Art School. I was considering the latter since I have experience teaching art to kids but in the end, I chose Harju.

I had my doubts not only because I wasn't comfortable working with teens, but it was also the first month of our studies and I seem to be in a group with two people who already have the chemistry together."

(A. Centina, written reflection, February 21, 2018)



MINJIN

"When I had only one year left to graduate from an elementary school, I came to decide whether I applied for a music school or public middle school. Since I started playing the piano from 7 years old, music has always been a joy in my life. However, as soon as I decided to go to a music school, I was forced to practice the piano at least for 5 hours a day to pass an exam. It was a big transition for me who had been enjoying music and practicing it with my own motivation. I stopped taking private lessons almost like a train with such a strict teacher and chose to go to a normal public school.

When I went to Harju for the first time, I naturally thought of my childhood. There were a group of youngsters enjoying music with friends in their free time. Some of them were thinking of music as one of their future careers, but the atmosphere was totally different! What was missing in my childhood? What was special in Harju? What does it mean for youths to come to Harju?

I might have realized the fundamental factor of art, which has faded for a long time in my life since I somehow failed to pursue music for my future. In Harju, art was regarded as not results, but processes. At the same time, art in Harju seemed to be defined not as the known, but as the knowing."

(M. Chung, written reflection, December 28, 2017)



ZIYU

At the beginning I couldn't really position myself as a "researcher", cuz that was the first time I participated in an art educational project. My initial interests in Harju was very personal.

They deal with music and art, they work with teenagers and young adults. Those are my interest areas and I thought I might be able to know some people and make some friends around my age there. I was somehow myself a young "immigrant" living in a foreign country alone for the first time in my life, I felt like I needed social support too.

Going to Harju might be a good chance for me to establish some connections in the foreign society, and I really couldn't position myself as "researcher". So, I preferred to go there in some informal situations without school project, just as a user.

The experiences in Harju really brought up the question about identity and position to me. I start to ask myself who am I, which group do I belong to. An "art educator" who tries to "help" the people and institution, or a young foreign adult who needs "help" and support from the institution. Or both, or neither?

(Z. Yu, written reflection, March 11, 2018)

Collective Reflection:

Going through our individual recollection of the events that transpired, we are collectively able to discern that each one of us highlighted different instances that impacted us throughout the course of the project. It showed three different perspectives. A project which provided us with different experiences and triggered various memories, emotions and personal concerns. We were able to relate to things that were focused on our individual experiences involving nostalgia, fear, doubt, hope, wonder, encouragement and identity.

“Thursdays in Harju” as we look at it, did not center on the output of the project but on Harju’s atmosphere to create possibilities. It opened-up a lot of questions that you can explore in different ways.

It is realizing that we all went for a project, but ended up with so much more. It became focused on the richness of relationships and the bond of the people.

We ventured into Harju, a space for non-formal learning, to fulfill a requirement that our formal education required but we ended up with personal experiences and possibilities opened up by informal learning situations which benefited both our formal education and Harju as a youth center. (A. Centina, Z. Yu, M. Chung, personal communication, March 24, 2017)

The reflections look into our (three AALTO students) experiences while conducting the project “Thursdays in Harju.” We took time to write our reflections individually, share them with each other and discuss our collective thoughts in relation to the similarities and differences of our take on the experiences. They put forward the different perspectives and experiences that we have had within that project.

THURSDAYS IN HARJU: IN RETROSPECT

Following these reflections, I provide my personal overview of the initial project with Harju and the learnings that have transpired during preparation and immersion. I will proceed by expounding on the transversal and intersectional role of formal education, non-formal space for learning and informal learning situations that informed the project.

“Thursdays in Harju” was our first collaboration. We were the first group to go on a meeting and explore the facilities. We spent a month of immersion and negotiating with ourselves, the gatekeepers as well as users of the space and trying to understand their programs and how they function. Thursdays are stuck with us. It is a free day where anyone can come in and try out an activity. We learned about the users’ experiences and their attachments to the place and we as researchers acquired our first lessons as NoVA students in terms of observation, adaptability, flexibility and reflexivity of our approaches and goals in creating a collaboration.

We ended up with an exhibition and an open mic night, which according to the art educators in Harju, was the first collaboration and mingling between their Music and Art users as well as the first research that did not focus on a technical approach. (A. Horttanainen, personal communication, November 23, 2016)



Figure 8 Allen and Melina discussing the changes in her skills during her first visits in Harju at age 8 and now

I make so many works. I make-drawings, paintings, costumes for “Yutaka” (cosplay), and other things. I like redoing my work. I like seeing the changes and my development, it inspires me to continue. I am usually surprised and proud of myself because I keep getting better and better. When I’m stressed, I do random works to feel good. I just paint, I don’t do it to make good artworks; it’s just that I want to feel good.

As for Harju, it is my second home. I have been coming here since I was 8 yrs old, 16 years ago. This is such a precious place. I can come and do what I want without anyone dictating what I have to do. This is such a good Atelier. (M. Molin, personal communication, November 17, 2016)



Figure 9 AK, a hip-hop duo, performing during the Open Mic Session

The event on the 23rd of November was attended by NoVA students from all partner universities (Konstfack, HiOA, AAU CPH, AALTO University)¹ and the artists' guests. As the facilitators of the project, we made sure to set a goal for the institution and a goal for us as researchers (apart from our own personal goals). We created an event for young artists and musicians alike with the idea of showcasing their talent and spirit to a wider audience and allowing them to discover the different possibilities and artistic work produced within the walls of Harju. The immersion in a youth community and wading in toward uncertainties allowed us a view of the ethnographic processes (although at that time, we did not have a clear understanding of this process) that led to unboxing of experiences and discoveries about ourselves and the center.

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In the excerpts of our three-way written conversation, it is evident that the details that affected each of us varied yet intersected with each other. Minjin recalls her childhood love of music and her longing for such an open creative space and the regard for process instead of result as well as experience instead of output.

I on the other hand shared instances of my doubts and fear of the unknown, which I realized is part of the experiences I had working as a teacher in an intercultural environment. I have foreseen the difficulties of working with a new group of individuals who know so little about each other yet understood that there is no other way than to dive in and free fall.

Ziyu expressed her personal concern as a young immigrant in Finland exposed to the space (Harju) questioning her position and exploring her personal identity. The experience became one of her earlier reflections that led to an exploration of identity.

Through this project, which involved a blurring of the boundaries between formal learning, nonformal learning and informal learning, paralleled with an introduction to methods of inquiry that was far beyond what I was used to, I ventured into exploring the various entanglements.

¹ Konstfack University of Arts Craft and Design in Stockholm, Sweden
 HiOA Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences in Oslo, Norway
 Aalborg University in Copenhagen, Denmark
 AALTO University in Helsinki, Finland

III. ON USERS OF THE SPACE AND LEARNING PROPOSALS

The initial project “Thursdays in Harju” has paved way for me to learn more about their programs and get to know the individual users and their interests. My constant interaction with three individuals namely Hanna, Irja and Mimosa led to a heuristic moment of planned collaborations through different learning platforms with the possibility to switch roles as learner, teacher, artist, writer, collaborator, and researcher.

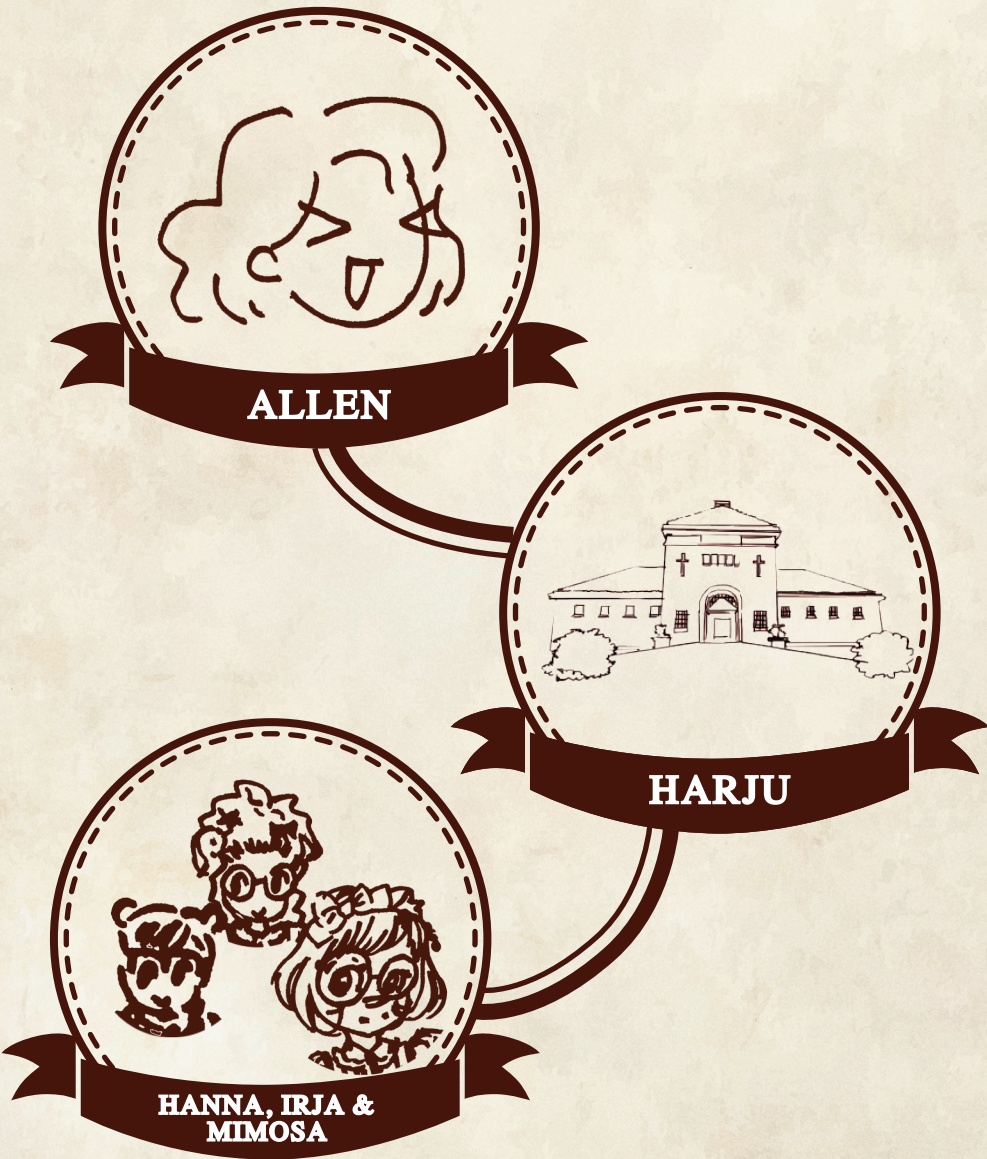


Figure 10 Interactions in Harju

REVISITING EARLIER INTERACTIONS

As discussed in the methodology chapter, three proposals of working together were presented but not all of them pushed through. It is still imperative that I give the readers an idea of how the individuals I interacted with inform this thesis as the users' perspective.

I start by recounting the event that transpired on the 5th of April 2017.

Location: Apollo

A pizza place somewhere around Kallio. This is where Minjin, Ziyu and I convened while we were working on Thursdays in Harju.

Time: Around 20:00

I was supposed to meet the ladies in Harju, but I wasn't feeling well. I felt the need to see them though, I can't delay the proposal any longer. I was on exchange in Sweden and took every chance I could to return to Helsinki to explore the possibilities of my thesis.

(I ordered Smetana, it's a pizza with cream sauce and some chilis) I wondered why its named that way. (I found out later from Hanna that it is derived from the Russian sour cream).

Over pizza, I presented the thesis proposal with Irja, Mimosa and Hanna. It wasn't a very serious discussion. I asked them to explore the idea and think about the possibility of collaborative learning. By then, Hanna and I already knew we were working on knitting. I opened-up the topic of writing and illustration since I thought they were both interested in them.

No certainty on what we're going to do, but it was open to suggestion.

We left a little late and I asked them where I could buy some cough and flu medicine. They ended up joining me and showing me the 24 Hours Apteekki (pharmacy). It was nice of them to do that.

(A. Centina, Personal Diary, April 5, 2017)

My interactions with Hanna, Irja and Mimosa extend beyond this thesis. They are three of the individuals who consistently attend the Thursday sessions in Harju and I was easily drawn to their jovial characters.



Figure 11 Earlier Interactions (Interview with Hanna, Irja and Mimosa for “Thursdays in Harju”)

USERS’ PERSPECTIVE OF HARJU

In the next section, I try to provide you with their views of Harju as a space, of its functions, their connections with each other and hopefully a glimpse into their personalities following the format of the interview conducted on March 14, 2018 as a follow-up to validate parts of the data.

I take the setting and the things that transpired during the interview to give you a more personal and sensorial perspective. Interviews are often depicted in a straightforward manner. An exchange of questions and answers leaving out the experience. In doing sensory ethnography, interviews can be a rich source of insight with the use of senses. It can give you the feeling of being within the same set-up, even as a reader, interacting with the participants. It offers a means of understanding an interview as a place-event. Sensory elicitation interviews can offer researchers new and valuable routes to other people’s experiences, knowledge and values among others. (Pink, 2015)

March 14, 2018
Atlantinkatu, Jätkäsaari

We just had dinner at my apartment and decided to use the common lounge for the interview. It is a huge space furnished with two L-shaped sofas, coffee tables, a kitchen space and dining sets that would fit 8 people. It is eerily quiet (before we came) and extremely odd that this relaxing space is always almost empty. We all agreed that we did look like fishes in an aquarium for truck and bus drivers passing by. They see us, we see them (or at least their vehicles).

Mimosa was feeling comfortable on the sofa and we pretty much chatted to the point of almost forgetting we were there for the follow-up interview. It was just like one of those hang out sessions. This time though the conversation was dominated with how they had to wait for Irja and always have had to wait for her whenever there is a meet-up and all the fuzz that goes with it.

I place the recorder on the coffee table and started composing myself (ready to step into my researcher shoes, although admittedly stepping in and out during the entire conversation).

The following is an account of the interview.

- Allen:** *Can you introduce yourselves and how long you have been going to Harju?*
- Interviewee 1:** *My name is Mimosa, I have been going to Harju for 5 years or more*
- Interviewee 2:** *I'm Irja, same time with Mimosa, we went there together as a team (smiles)*
- Interviewee 2:** *My name is Hanna and I've been going to Harju for 10 years now*
- Allen:** *You have been going to Harju for a very long time. How is Harju different then and now?*
- Irja:** *There's a lot of people now. There were less people going there before.*

Hanna: *The first time I went to Harju, I did not even know that they had this type of youth centers. Before, I thought that youth centers were for kids or for people under 18. I didn't know they have centers that provide proper things to do like ceramic art. If you say youth center, the first thing people will think of is that it is a place where kids go and do stupid stuff, maybe play pool or something and nothing else. Not the kind of setting that you see in Harju.*

Allen: ***When did the three of you start hanging out, is it during the Thursday sessions or you also meet during other sessions?***

Mimosa: *We met on Thursday sessions.*

Hanna: *I was doing ceramics and then they came, I already knew Irja but we were not yet friends that time, more like acquaintances and then she (Mimosa) came along and they seemed so nice and crazy so we started going out.*

Irja: *I think it took time before we started hanging out. I really don't remember when we hung out outside of Harju for the first time.*

Allen: ***Were you interested in a specific art form at the start and moved on to others?***

Hanna: *I don't remember but I think I first started doing ceramics and then did other stuffs.*

Allen: ***What makes you want to keep on going back to Harju?***

Mimosa: *Work? (chuckles) I think it's the good environment and the space to do crafts and paintings. And we have our own brushes!*

Irja: *Also, it gets you out of your house, it's like you have some place to go to.*

Allen: ***When I spoke to the administrators and instructors in Harju, I was under the impression that one of the key aims is to promote empowerment. They have these very loose guidelines, but it is there. Do you feel that there are invisible guidelines, or do you see it just as a free space?***

Hanna: *I don't think they really have that kind of guidelines, it's just a very chill out kind of place. I mean, you can just chill out or go there without doing anything.*

- Irja:** *I think it is the atmosphere there, you can pretty much work whenever you want. They will help you in what you want to do, and you don't have to produce something specific. For example, today we are doing this and that (different types of creative output). In Harju, you can decide on your own and they (instructors) are there to help you out. I think the empowerment stuff mostly apply to the younger groups.*
- Allen:** ***Is it more like a mix of both but the adjustments are made depending on the groups coming in?***
- Hanna:** *The little kids who go to Harju, they have a scheduled activity.*
- Irja:** *Obviously. Because it's easier for children to have a guideline rather than telling them to do something freely. I don't know but the good thing in Harju is that they don't have to tell you what to do. If you have a great idea that you want to do even if you are a younger kid, you get to work on it and they would not be against it even if one has deviated from a certain activity. They will even encourage you to be creative. I think it is a big part of Harju.*
- Hanna:** *You are free to express yourself in any form or medium that you like, and they are supportive. And if you don't feel like doing anything you can just come and hang out or you don't have to do anything if you don't want to. And it feels like a second home.*
- Allen:** ***If the three of you are not in Harju all at the same time, do you talk to others or you just keep to yourselves?***
- Irja:** *I talk to some people that I know that have been going there for a long time.*
- Hanna:** *I talk to people I know, to the instructors, but I don't talk to people I don't know. I don't socialize much.*
- Mimosa:** *I don't, unless I find a certain topic that I might be interested in while listening to people's conversation and I really have something to say about it.*
- Allen:** ***Who are you outside of Harju? Outside of each other? What are you interested in and to what or where would you be associated with?***

Irja: *If I'm alone I write, because I don't do that with people. I like to watch a lot of series on Netflix at home like Marvel series, right now I'm watching Jessica Jones.*

Mimosa: *I play video games. I play with my friends but since they are a bit far away (in other countries) we plan to meet if there is an opportunity. When I play online games with my friends I get to practice language, like German and of course English.*

Hanna: *I listen to speech radio. It's mostly discussing science, politics, and any current topics. I do my crafts at home. I don't go out much.*

Allen: *(Follow-up question to Hanna) Is it in English?*

Irja: *Unfortunately for you it's in Finnish.*

Irja (Interjects with giddiness): *I forgot to mention that I listen to a lot of music. I have favorite bands that I'm obsessed with. I do watch documentaries about my favorite bands and fan girling about it. But before I do that I make sure nobody is there to witness it.*

Everyone laughs (laughter pretty much dominated the entire interview, especially with Mimosa's facial responses to the questions posed).

We decided to end the interview there and moved on to other topics. There was so much to discuss and gun violence in US schools dominated the conversation after.

CHAPTER REFLECTIONS

Through the initial interactions and the follow-up interview with Hanna, Irja and Mimosa, we get a glimpse of how relationships are forged within the walls of Harju. Thursdays for them became a common ground. Interestingly, Harju, with its isolated location has drawn a lot of interest from the youth and others alike, due to its conception of a "free for all" Thursdays. There is no need to book for a session, anybody can just come in and feel free to be creative.

A contrast in terms of imposition of principles and guidelines in Harju was detected in the responses. The subtle yet solid inclination of the youth center towards empowerment was somehow felt only with a target audience. Perhaps it is through the center's loose approach and facilitation of a peer learning experience that this becomes invisible and effective.

In this representation of the interview, I would say that it has captured some of the elements of the setting, the conversations and the experience that transpired that day. However, it is not a full account of the experience. Those who were present are the only ones who have gained from the experience in a way that visual and textual representation cannot replicate but only attempt to describe.

IV. KNITTING AS A WINDOW TO LEARNING ENTANGLEMENTS

Hours of knitting the in step and the foot part of my sock, I feel my left hand starting to feel sore, my thumb, pointer and middle finger beginning to feel numb. I still can't hold my moving thread in the same way I have been taught, it feels awkward. I knit a lot faster holding the yarn in my own way.

(A.Centina, personal diary, 04.2018)

Row 1. MY PREJUDICE ABOUT KNITTING IN FINLAND

Knitting, as I see it, is a huge crafting practice in Finland. I even thought that most people here just waltz through the entire process with eyes closed. It has been fascinating to watch for someone like me who grew in the tropics with crochet as the closest I'd get to knitting. In one of our random conversations in the class, my professor mentioned of the Finnish team knitting on the sidelines of the Winter Olympics 2018. I refer to the Reuters account of it to demonstrate how much of a practice it is in Finland and how it functions as a soothing and relaxing activity.



Figure 12 Imaged grabbed from Reuters online article

Yarns, stitches, loops and purls, instead of spins, flips and slides... the Finnish team in Pyeongchang are using the soothing effects of knitting when Olympic pressure becomes too great. (Shine, 2018)

As a beginner in this craft, I feel amused by how my knitting reflections contradict that of the team's claim. I understand that it will take time, but I will get there, eventually, hopefully.

Row 2. LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF KNITTING

In the chapter "Navigating with Patterns" I have explained that knitting became a way for Hanna and myself to explore the reflections, relations and entanglements that occur in an informal learning situation. My initial thought was to learn how to work with ceramics, a craft that strikes my interest. Knowing that Hanna is adept in this craft, I presented her with the thought. A conversation on producing socks and knitting arose and Hanna suggested that since I would love to be able to make my own socks, why not work on knitting instead of ceramics. We agreed. Excitement followed and, in this chapter, through a variety of visual and reflexive methods, we aim to bring forward our reflections while exploring the craft of knitting and assuming the role of a learner and a teacher.

The reflections and data presented here will not focus on providing the readers with the basic instructions on how to start off with knitting. The aim of this is not to produce an instructional text but to present an assemblage of experiences that may or may not be related to the technical aspects of knitting.

However, I would begin by providing you with an overview of the technical terms in knitting that may be discussed in the reflections and the texts that follow.



Figure 13 To Cast On is to start off with a row on one your needles as a baseline for the succeeding rows.



Figure 14 Knitting is a type of stitch that produces a row or rows of stitches looking like braided hair.



Figure 15 Purling is a type of stitch that also produces a row or rows of stitches looking like dashes.



Figure 16 Ribbing is a pattern where one creates a rib-like structure by alternately doing knitting and purling on one side.



Figure 17 Casting Off is carefully gathering together and sealing off your stitches when you complete the pattern.

A **pattern** is more like a step by step instruction on how to work your chosen design. For this project, Hanna chose a free and simple pattern “**Just Yer Basic Sport Sock**”. (A. Johnson, 2007, Retrieved from <https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/just-yer-basic-sport-sock>)

Decreasing and **Increasing** means either to reduce the number of stitches or add on to achieve a certain shape such as the narrow end of the toes and the in-step that holds the heel of your foot.



Figure 18 The cuff, the heel flap, instep, gusset, feet and toes are all parts of the socks that needs to be constructed.

Row 3. NEGOTIATING THE PROJECT

While spending a semester in Sweden and after going through several ideas and changes in the focus of this thesis, I started contacting Hanna and discussing the possibility of working with her on this project. It became apparent that I wanted to concentrate on the user experience and decided to schedule travels between Stockholm and Helsinki within a two-month period (April – May 2017) to discuss the project and and prepare a proposal. An account of the meeting from both our diaries follow.

Sunday, April 30th

Today I met with Allen to discuss her thesis and we decided that I will be teaching her how to knit a pair of socks. I've never taught anyone how to knit, let alone in English, so it will be a new and interesting experience for me.

I've knit for about 15 years now and rarely use pre-existing patterns but if I do, they have to be in English because I find Finnish knitting patterns too difficult and sometimes even infuriating to follow. Patterns in English however are usually very well written and are not open to interpretation.

First, I will have to teach Allen the basics: how to hold the needles, cast-on, knits and purls, decreasing and increasing etc. I think all this will go well. I hope. At least I'm excited. Some moments I think to myself "what did I get myself in to?!" but most of the time I feel it'll all be okay. I'm trying not to stress out about it.

For next time I'll find her a suitable yarn to practice on and start digging for a simple pattern for the upcoming socks, which we'll start on after she has gotten the hang of the basics of knitting.

Hanna

April 30, 2017 (Sunday)

The first meet-up with Hanna on the eve of Vappu day to discuss the project was unexpected; I didn't know what Vappu was and she mentioned that it can be crazy out there and that we can meet at her place to discuss the project. The next day, I understood what she meant.

I went to her place with no expectations. It was only a venue for us to discuss the project I had in mind. I was wowed by what I saw. A vast variety of art forms and a lot of preserved insects (Hanna did some of the preserving). I became excited as it reminded me of my father who has a background in agriculture and entomology. Dragonflies and butterflies were perfectly framed on the wall. I was named after a damselfly and to see them here bring back memories of me running around the school quadrangle trying to catch dragonflies.

Something I don't get to do anymore. Insects I rarely see. Hannah told me I could see them in spring and summer here in Finland. I haven't had that chance yet.

We discussed the project and I asked her if it would be possible for her to teach me ceramics and we eventually decided on knitting.

I think all I could vividly remember after that was browsing through a book about dragonflies that was given by her dad's friend. I remember telling her, I couldn't find a single dragonfly that looks like the ones I see back home. She said, "but you haven't even finished the book yet!" That made me reflect on my impatience.

Hanna showed me the different needles and materials for knitting. I also found very familiar tools for needle work.

Allen

As we negotiated and discussed our materials and project work, we also decided that the best way to document our thoughts is through writing notes and a diary log. While reading through our entries for the first meeting, I realized that we both highlighted different concerns and thoughts.

While I tried to take in what I have experienced and seen in her space, Hanna contemplated on the novelty of the idea to teach in her second language.

I wandered off in some memories that Hanna's artworks and space have evoked, and Hanna has questioned her decision of getting involved in this research.



Figure 19 A Photo I sent my Dad of Hanna's wall art

Row 4. LEARNING THE BASICS

After the first meeting on the 30th of April, it took another four months before we were able to start with the actual knitting project. There were clashes in the individual schedule and extended travel plans. Finally, in September, we were able to meet.

Sunday, September 10th

After a long hiatus we finally met again. It hit me that Allen really hasn't had any experience with knitting, I had to teach her how to make a slip knot for the cast-on. But I feel like that was the hardest part, after that Allen was surprisingly intuitive, fearless and quick to learn, even though her way of tensioning the working yarn is still a bit off but all in all she's doing very, very well. She has mastered the long-tail cast-on and doing well with her knits and purls.

We started with 20 cast-on stitches and the stockinette stitch pattern. Garter stitch is probably the more common stitch pattern to teach complete beginners, but it uses only the knit stitch and I think it might be harder for distinguishing individual stitches and rows from the fabric, not to mention right and wrong sides. Just my opinion and personal experience.

Hanna

September 10, 2017 (Sunday)

At this point, we have decided to find time outside of Harju to meet. We both know I'm eager to knit my first pair of socks, but it also took a long time before we could start with our first lesson. Our schedules were clashing but we finally made it work.

Hanna provided me with some tools and my favorite colored yarn (mustard yellow). I was to start with two needles and work with a swatch where I will learn how start by casting on. I also learned the two basic stitches: knitting and purling. New to the craft, my handiwork was sloppy, and the stitches were either too tight or too loose.

Excited to do it at home and remember how it works.

"Whenever you feel right, then it's wrong", Hanna's words keep ringing in my head.

Allen



Figure 20 Knitting and Purling Swatch
(A photo sent to Hanna to show her my progress)

I happily did my work in my own time. After a huge progress with my swatch, I sent a photo to Hanna. She was happy with my progress but noticed that knit stitches are twisted. She mentioned that the threads should be leaning to the right. Frustration sets in.... Again, whenever you feel right, then it's wrong.

Hanna assured me that it is ok to make these mistakes. It adds character. And besides this is still a swatch.

October 1, 2017 (Sunday)

I am still confused how knit stitches should look like. I cannot tell whether I am doing knitting or purling anymore. I can't even identify which ones are the twisted stitches. To me they all look perfect. It frustrates me, but I keep going. I seem to be bothering Hanna so much with my confusion.

It will get better.

Allen

Sunday, October 1st

There are times when I feel very frustrated about my teaching skills. I feel like I need to get a degree for this project. My English fails me and it's hard for me to try to make Allen understand what I'm trying to say at times. I guess this is all just me being too hard on myself. We had a little miscommunication about how to form the stitches, but we got through it pretty quickly. It was actually more my fault, I think. Knitting is so automatic for me, it's in my muscle memory. It's surprisingly difficult to perceive how individual stitches should be formed when you usually don't need to think about it, you just knit. What I've learned is that it doesn't matter how good you are, you can still be crap at it at the same time.

Hanna

In the next few sessions with Hanna, we both agreed that things were getting better. I have been learning to knit, purl, and do it in multiple rows. She has also taught me how to decrease, increase and do ribbing. She thinks that it is the most efficient way to make the cuff area of the socks sturdy and tight. I do not want to end up with socks that fall off my feet. I was getting impatient (again) because I still feel like I am stuck with the swatch. I want to do the socks, but I trust Hanna knows when I am ready. A couple of sessions after, we went to Snurre (a knitting store in Kamppi) to choose the yarn I am going to use for the actual socks. I chose a purple yarn. I did not want a color that could easily get dirty (I was contemplating on getting teal or mustard yellow at first).



Figure 21 The spools of yarn sold at Snurre, a knitting and needle craft store located at Kamppi

Hanna was running slightly late and I browse through the selection on the shop. There were books, needles and a lot of different types of woolen yarn. They also arranged some finished products for customers to check through. This hat reminded me of my swatch and the ribbing process.



Figure 22 Samples of Knitted products at Snurre

Sunday, November 5th

Allen's first sock is cast on! She's knitting 'knit 2, purl 2'-rib in the round with five double ended needles and she got the hang of it fast.

Hanna

November 5, 2017 (Sunday)

I have finally started with the cuff of the socks. Hanna helped me roll the spool of yarn and instead of dividing it to two, she suggested I just cut it when I'm done with the first and continue with the second sock.

Again, I struggled with casting on. I was so used to the flow of knits and purls now that to cast on was a struggle. Hanna managed to remind me of how it's done, and I proceeded with the ribbing for the cuff. It was fun to see it take form!

Allen



Figure 23 Hanna keeping the yarn in place while I start rolling it into a ball



Figure 24 We are now ready to knit!

Row 5. KNOTTING THE CHALLENGES IN KNITTING AND WRITING

A significant amount of time had been spent working on getting the learner to understand and execute the basics of knitting and produce a pair of socks. Although the process was only halfway through, the pressing matter of how both the learner and teacher were to discuss their experiences in a written format was forthcoming. The logs were huge and in disarray, so a collective decision was made. Both were to create a pilot writing log which would include that day's interaction. It was a Sunday, November 19th, 2017 at 21:05.

November 19, 2017 (Sunday)

Spent a few days before this meeting trying to complete the Ribbing process that covers the calf area for the socks. Today, I was determined to start on the next part: the heel area. Knitting on Sundays have become a part of my routine, much like the repetitive stitches that I needed to do. You think it has become ordinary and easy until you are faced with a shift in the process. It puts you on your toes and then it goes back to the way they were until another step comes along.

Today started mostly with the basics. Knitting and purling, knitting and purling, something I have grown comfortable with, until I was asked to do a slipped stitch at the end. A change that would make me feel uncomfortable and mindful of the steps I'm taking for some time (Just when I have started to do the patterns mindlessly).

Looking at the instructions in the pattern was like looking at a foreign language. Hanna was quick to explain and instruct me of what to do next. She encouraged me to move forward (I halted) and walked me through the next steps. Thinking about it, I probably won't be able to do it on my own. I would have made a mess out of the stitches, something she had termed, characterfully done, a term we'd laugh about but agree with anyway.

Allen

Sunday, November 19th

Allen has reached the start of the sock's heel flap. Although, now I realize there are even more difficult phases to come. When she gets over the heel, the rest of the sock will be like a child's play. I feel that I'm being lazy with my teaching even though, in reality, I guess I've done well; I mean Allen has come a long way. I might be cutting corners. Maybe I'm being too hard on myself? This writing thing really isn't my forte.

Allen is knitting the heel flap today and is doing great. I taught her about the "slipped stitch" but forgot about the importance of slipping the stitches differently on either side of the heel flap. I don't think it's such an important thing really, it won't show on the outside of the sock. Her first pair of knitted socks will have character.

Hanna

Collective Reflection:

After looking through the writings we both did for today's knitting activity, it has been agreed that what started out as a dreaded Sunday collaboration became a nice routine. The reflections convey a level of uncertainty either in the process of writing, learning and teaching. It reflects our worries on different tasks. One writes about the inability to visualize the written pattern and the other, with her doubts on the ability to teach and write about it. While one of us considers the future and plans for more difficult phases ahead, the other looks back into the things she's learned and her current struggle. One thing is for certain, there is a constant appreciation for the "character" formed through difficulties and mistakes.

Row 6. A SOCK, COMPLETE!

Sunday, November 26th

A day filled with mistakes and dropped stitches. We have gotten through the cuff, heel flap and turn heel. Now we are working on the instep/gusset and it's starting to look like a sock. Allen has needed a lot of help, but oh how happy she is about her sock!

I've had trouble focusing on what the pattern says and that's probably why some mistakes occurred, but maybe it's okay. Knits are easy to fix, and I personally am not afraid of unravelling because of mistakes, I do it a lot because I aim for perfection, hah. Allen's sock has some mistakes in it but it's her first ever knitting project, and as I've said before it's supposed to have character. There will always be room for improvement and new techniques to learn if she wants to hone her skills further.

Hanna

November 26, 2017 (Sunday)

Been working on the 24 rows of knitting and purling and somewhere along the rows before completion, I have made a mistake and worried how to proceed, I was waiting for today to come so that Hanna can check and instruct me on what needs to be done.

After completing the heel, I am now working on the turn heel part, it was difficult to figure things out, but I managed, looking forward to the part that Hanna describes as "a child's play". Only that it wasn't a child's play; I made too many mistakes and had to unravel too many rows as I try to remember the different stitches and different patterns I had to do on each row.

I was beginning to think that I am able to read through the foreign language called "the patterns". I even thought that the Finnish Language is far more difficult than this. But then, I start reading through unfamiliar instructions and again, I'm lost in translation. I needed visuals and Hanna was quick to show me the structure.

Come to think of it, this was probably a child's play. We always think that a child's play is easy, but we don't always see how a child creatively sets a complicated set of rules constantly subjected to changes and negotiation.

I am working on a repeat of rows now until I reach 12 on each needle.

A thought while doing the process, why does the purl stitch get to be the one at the wrong side of the product. Is it because it's called knitting?

Allen

December 10, 2017 (Sunday)

I finally got to finish one of the socks! I struggled with the shifts in the process, but I managed with Hanna's guidance. I realized that it would have been easier had we divided the yarn into two rolls. That way I could simultaneously work on both left and right foot. I think I got stuck so many times in a shifting process that I had to wait till Hanna and I met again to clarify things. I am not very good in grasping the video tutorials in YouTube.

Hanna and I are both left handed so I can pretty much understand when she shows and works with her own knitting side by side.

Allen



Figure 25 Finishing up the toe part of the sock



Figure 26 Trying it on before casting off

Row 7. THE ART OF TRANSLATING

Learning and understanding are two ways of expressing the same act of translation. There is nothing beyond the texts except the will to express, that is, to translate.

(Rancière, 1991, p. 10)

In order for me to work on the other pair, I needed to find a way to retain some of the instructions. I struggled with the written text and I devised a strategy to help me through it. I tried to visualize the patterns and while executing them, I replicated the thoughts through visuals. This has helped me go through some difficult areas in the socks (on other days, Hanna had to step in).

Heel Flap:

The heel flap is worked over the first 24 (28) stitches of your round. The other 24 (28) stitches are the instep stitches, which will be held in place on the needles while you knit the heel flap. When you reach the end of your last round for the leg, continue as follows:

Set-up:

Row 1: Knit across 12 (14) stitches. Turn your work – you'll knit the next row on the wrong side (purl bumps) of the sock.

Row 2: Slip first stitch purlwise, purl across remaining 23 (27) stitches. (You'll be working back across the first and fourth needles of your round.) Turn your work – you'll be knitting on the right side again on the next row.

Row 3: Slip first stitch purlwise, knit across remaining 23 (27) stitches. Turn. Row 4: Slip first stitch purlwise, purl across remaining 23 (27) stitches. Turn

Continue repeating rows 3 and 4 ten (12) more times. You should have 24 (28) rows in your heel flap TOTAL (including your setup rows). Note: You will always slip the first stitch of the row purlwise – this will make a nice neat little chain of stitches along the side of the heel flap for you to pick up for the gusset.

Figure 27 Instructions from a Knitting Pattern

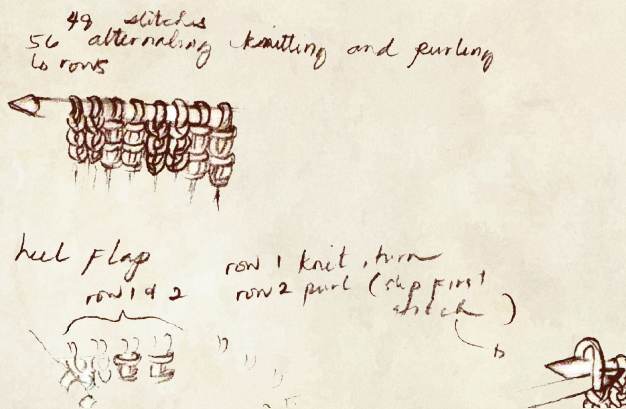


Figure 28 Allen's visualization of the instructions

Row 8. ON KNITTING CUISINES

One of the many entanglements of learning how to knit is the opportunity to share interests in various areas of everyday life. On Sundays, not only have we bonded on knitting, we have also found a common ground on culinary palates. A fascination for spices and uncommon food choices that have made our meetings more interesting.

I recall,

October 1, 2017 (Sunday)

Today, Hanna visited my place. There's going to be a renovation at her address and it's a mess, so we decided to have the session at my place. My Filipino instinct kicked in and I started planning what to cook. I know she's allergic to nuts, so I prepared some rice, adobo (a Filipino food where chicken or pork meat is sautéed with garlic and onions then soaked and left to simmer with soy sauce and some Annatto seeds extract) and potatoes fried in Indian spices (with some spicy ginger and mango pickles on the side).

We discussed the food while knitting. Surprisingly, Hanna did not seem to be bothered by the spices. She enjoyed it (I think so), except for the spicy mango pickles.

Allen

There were many more meetings with interesting interactions on food and spices. Sometimes, when Hanna asks me about a dish and the ingredients, I am left speechless. I haven't really thought about it. We discovered some health benefits from the spices used, why the process of cooking had to be different and the ever-present rice (she eventually bought her own rice cooker). Hanna's tolerance to spicy food is higher than it used to be, and we continue to explore different types of food that we both know how to prepare.



Figure 29 Ingredients



Figure 30 Gambas



Figure 31 Stuffed Chilis

I went to make a Karelian pie, a Finnish favorite and met Hanna's parents too!



Figure 32 Making the Rye Base



Figure 33 Filling it up with Rice Porridge and sealing it

The Karelian pie or pastry (singular *karjalanpiirakka*) is a food item that's made up of a thin rye crust and a filling of rice porridge. Traditionally it is eaten with a topping of *munavoi* (chopped boiled eggs mixed with butter). The crust is traditionally made only with rye flour, cold water and salt. The crusts are rolled thin and round with a traditional rolling pin sort of item called a 'pulikka'. The filling is nowadays made mainly out of rice porridge, but one can also use potatoes or carrots. The porridge is spread on the center of the crust and then the edges are rucked on top of the filling with the thumb and index fingers to form a sort of elliptical shape to the pie. They are then baked in a very hot oven for a short time. (H. Päivinen, personal communication, April 9, 2018)



Figure 34 Enjoying our freshly baked carelian pie and salmon

Hanna also expressed her thoughts on our food encounters. Here are some of the description of condiments, ingredients and food that she is interested in which I never even thought about. She provided very vivid sensorial descriptions that I could not even think of, having been so used to the tastes of the food or ingredients that we have back home. The images were taken by her during our Hakaniemi trip for a photo-elicitation project.



Figure 35 Pinakurat Vinegar

Suka pinakurat, the spicy coconut vinegar that smells positively of death and has the tongue burning flavor of battery acid from Hell goes surprisingly well as a dip with chicharon pork rinds and stinky dried squid. Absolutely delicious! If I had a motto it would probably be “I wonder if it’s good with pinakurat.” - Pro tip: When you spill pinakurat on your rug, baking soda is your knight in smell removing armor. Everytime. (H. Päivinen, written reflection, November 29, 2017)

Bitter melon is a veggie I’ve heard about from Allen but again I have not tasted it. It looks funny. Like a cucumber with a medical condition. (H. Päivinen, written reflection, November 29, 2017)

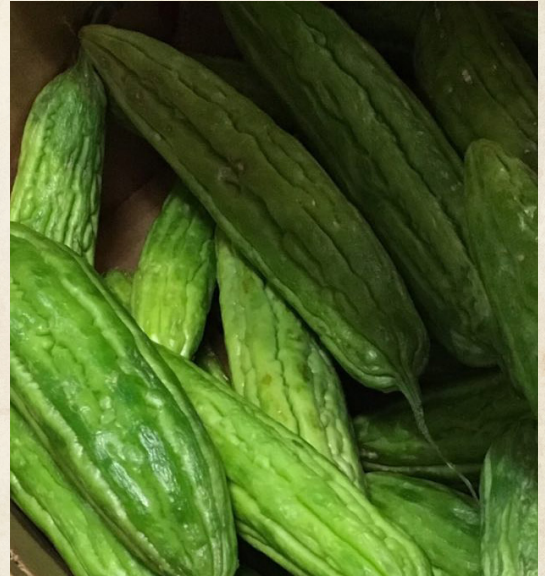


Figure 36 Bitter melon

CHAPTER REFLECTIONS

*"An emancipated community is a community
of narrators and translators".*

(Rancière, 2009, p. 22)

What I coin as Knitting Entanglements, Hanna terms as "Operation: sock(s) for Allen". The exploration into this learning situation started out as a window into the reversal of roles and our reflections, diaries, thoughts and interactions have gone beyond just investigating our roles. It has disappeared in the assemblage of materials and experiences. It is also apparent in our writings that we sometimes become engrossed with the labels we have created for ourselves that the writings still speak so much of our role, yet our experiences present something different.

During the course of the project, we were able to explore our other interests and the interaction became fluid. Not only was I learning about knitting, I also learned about the political scene in Finland and the government functions that I would not be aware of (or least aware of) had I not engaged into this project. Hanna for most parts was interested in our culinary traditions and vice versa.

CHAPTER 4

Casting Off (Or Not)

Looking back into the sections that inform this thesis which includes learning about Harju and their social function, principles and roles as a non-formal learning space; the pilot project “Thursdays in Harju”; the users’ perspective of the space and relationships they have forged; and the knitting entanglements with Hanna initially appeared to be abstracted and detached. But the experiences and the connections nurtured in this space of possibilities allow them to converge and support the informal learning experience.

META-ANALYSIS

The interviews with administrators and staff of Harju highlighted their function in terms of site, learning, their principles, strategies and their deep awareness of the roles that they play in the arts and music center. This part of the data puts Harju as a space for open learning.

The pilot project “Thursdays in Harju” with Minjin and Ziyu establishes our connection with the space. It became a window for further collaborations and an exploration of our personal affinity with Harju. This section of the data provides an understanding of the variety of roles and reflections that a single project could invoke; and the collective reflection of Harju’s function as a space of possibilities.

Interactions with Hanna, Irja and Mimosa including that of the follow-up interview demonstrate how relationships and connections are forged within the space. It provides a glimpse of the users’ perspective of the center and a dissimilar yet fitting description of Harju’s principles from their point of view. It also hints on the importance of programs such as their open access Thursdays in building and maintaining this community of connections.

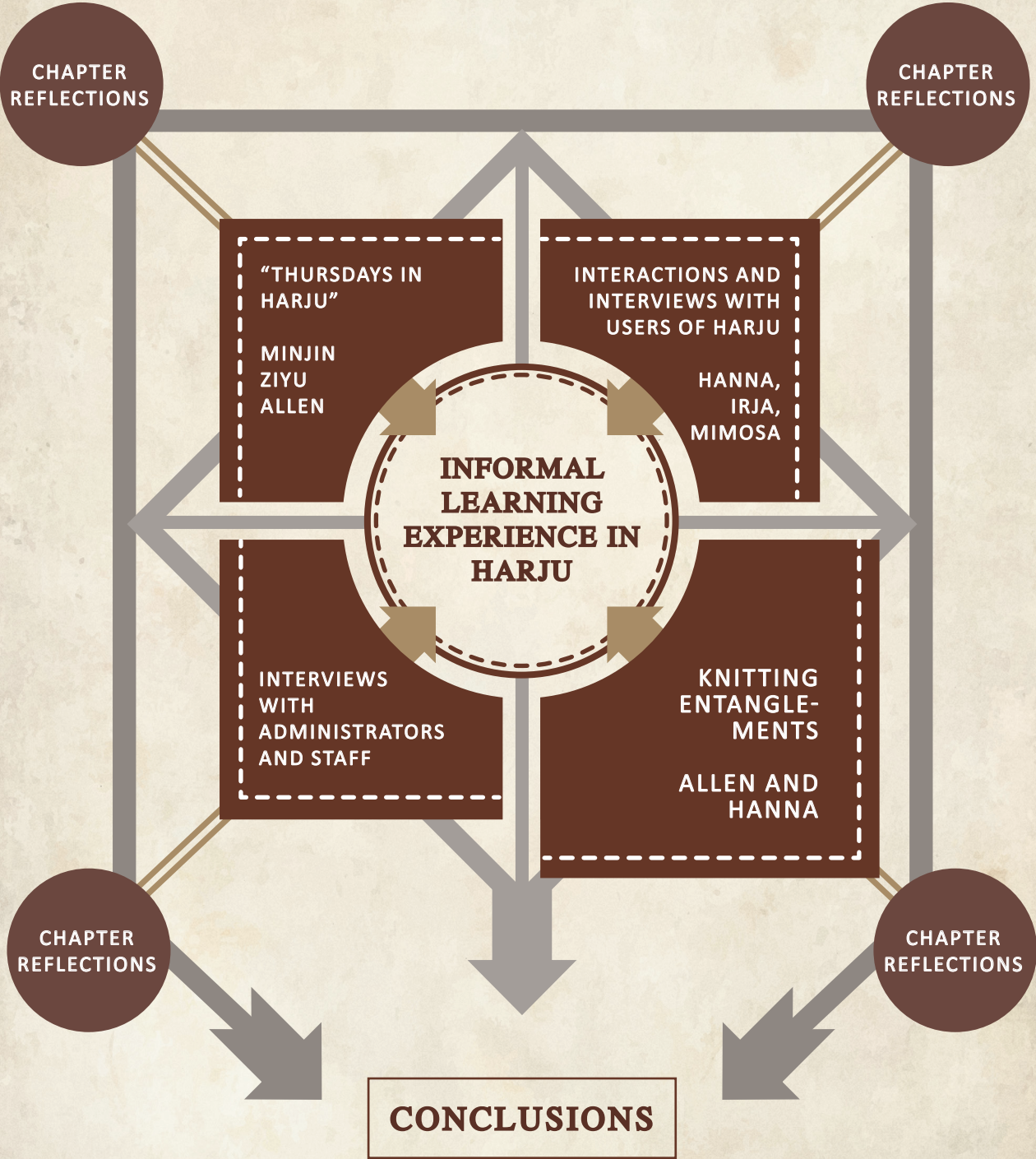


Figure 37 Meta-analysis Diagram

Knitting the four parts of the data, including the experience with Hanna, situates Harju as the “Third”. According to Rancière, the logic of emancipation between the ignorant schoolmaster and the emancipated novice is always a third thing – a book or some piece of writing – alien to both which they can verify in common what the pupil has seen, what she says about it and what she thinks of it. The same applies in the case of Harju, it has become for the staff, the researchers and the users of the space, a “third thing”, owned by no one. But which subsists between them excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect. (2011, p. 15)

Harju as a site and a space becomes a moving constant that creates assemblages of roles, learning, possibilities and connections.

Stepping back and looking at the knitting experience with Hanna situates Harju as a space for connections and departures. I look at it as an airport hub with the different functions and connections, a rhizome of experience. A place that operates as a departure, arrival and often, an in-between. Ours is that of a constant shift among these functions.

Emancipation means the blurring of the boundaries between those who act and those who look; between individuals and a collective body. (Rancière, 2011 p.19)

Knitting between Hanna and I assumed the role of the “third” within the experience. It became a point of departure to the different entanglements within a learning situation. While learning how to knit, we also learned about each other’s culture, interests and the struggle to use or learn from a language one is not comfortable with (I struggled with the patterns and Hanna the idea of teaching in English). We started with duality and oppositions and realized that there is this web of connections that blurs the boundaries unconsciously while the “learning” is at play.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

I have explicitly acknowledged the use of Critical Ethnography in this thesis. I have clearly expressed that I use the term critical to highlight the departure from the positivist approach of ethnography in research. No participant observation and analysis can be a “true” representation of what transpires in a setting. I recognize my biases and limitations in terms of the representations in this thesis.

Voice giving has been very evident in the data, but my perspective as the researcher driven by my own biases is present in the reflections and interpretations.

In trying to relay the participants’ response to the questions posed, I presented them with the visual and textual output to clarify that the representations coincide with their thoughts and are the closest (as there is no such thing as accurate) representations.

In this thesis, the diaries and written reflections provide the closest representations of the events and the contradictions in a given context. While I aim for reflexivity and critical approaches in field work, it is hard to say that writing an academic text would completely permit you to use a multi-voice approach in the (re)presentation. I acknowledge that I exercised my position as the researcher in choosing the visual and textual representations, but it will never be able to encompass the events and experiences between myself and the participants in this study.

Those experiences will always be our own, and those presented in this book will be subject to your interpretations and translations.

CONCLUSION (Taking It Further)

This thesis situates Harju, an arts and craft youth center, as a space of possibilities with a strong inclination to open and participatory approaches to learning, diversity and creativity. It highlights the principles needed to function effectively as a youth-oriented center. The thesis opens-up possibilities and realizations for the users of the space to explore a different platform for learning and interaction which could mutually benefit the users of the space and Harju as an institution.

Through the fieldwork and interactions in this research, I have gained relations, experiences and learnings crucial to my growth in the field of art education. Furthermore, I have gained insights in the crossover between social work and art education while researching within and in relation to Harju. The art and experience-based project with Hanna heightened my regard for positionality, constant negotiation and reflexivity that would be helpful when working in the field.

This thesis with a focus on Harju as a case can provide organizations and institutions in the same field, an alternative approach or platform for use in learning. I would argue that every youth- oriented space “should be” Harju, in its essence. The variety of methods in documenting, extracting and validating data from the different participants can also be useful in bringing to light strengths and areas of improvement of an organization/institution.

I look forward to more projects and research involving art and experience as a mode of inquiry in a collective setting.

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